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ABSTRACT

A national study was conducted at the University of Texas to ascertain the current status of the practice of evaluating full-time faculty in public two-year colleges. Surveys were sent to the chief academic officer of 210 randomly selected two-year colleges requesting information on the climate of the organization when the evaluation system was implemented; the development of the purposes of and criteria used in evaluation; the procedures used in evaluation, appraisal review, and feedback; and the impact of the evaluation process. Based on responses from 141 institutions, study findings revealed: (1) many of the elements of a theoretical systems model for evaluation were practiced by the colleges surveyed, including input from the college constituency, an emphasis on classroom instruction, and the use of multiple sources and methods of evaluation; (2) evaluation elements that correlated significantly with satisfaction with the evaluation process included participation of college members in the formulation and implementation of the system, an emphasis on faculty improvement, and the use of clearly defined criteria and standards of performance; and (3) significant negative relationships existed between the evaluation system and respondent satisfaction where respondents were dissatisfied with a prior evaluation system, where collective barganing representatives had input into the development of criteria, and where the primary purpose of the evaluation was to satisfy external agencies. (HB)

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STUDY EXAMINING THE ISSUES OF FACULTY EVALUATION

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Abstract

Performance evaluation has emerged as an integral part of realizing accountability in the two-year colleges. To determine the current status of the practice of formally evaluating full-time faculty in public two-year colleges, a national survey was conducted at The University of Texas. Further, an identification of the most satisfactory practices was sought so that discrepancies could be detected and recommendations be made.

Based on an analysis of the survey data, it was found that many of the evaluation elements of a theoretical systems model developed from the literature are those also practiced in some form by the colleges sampled. Current evaluation systems seem to have the following characteristics: substantial input of the college constituency; emphasis on improvement of instruction; and comprehensive in scope and procedure although varied in approach. Satisfactory systems appear to be those that are accepted based on their credibility.

STUDY EXAMINING THE ISSUES OF FACULTY EVALUATION

Evaluation of faculty is not a new concept. What is new is the importance it has received in this "Age of Accountability". Accountability has come to mean that someone or something should be held responsible for the attainment of specific objectives as just return for an investment of time, energy, and money. In other words, if financial support of our postsecondary institutions is to continue, each constituent of the college community will have to demonstrate that it is providing quality services for the monies invested. Thus it appears that faculty evaluation will continue to be an important issue in education.

However, not only is performance evaluation seen as an important process, it is also regarded as something very difficult to do well. Evidence of this difficulty is seen in the agreement among faculties and administrators that the task is exceedingly complex, in disagreement about how best to conduct evaluations, and in frequent expressions of dissatisfaction with various aspects of evaluation processes and their outcomes. A review of the factors that influence the effectiveness of evaluation shows that there is a substantial body of literature arguing that a wide array of factors has an impact upon the effectiveness of the evaluation process. Effective faculty evaluation depends upon a careful examination and understanding of the cumulative effects on many aspects of the process and the environment in which the process is taking place.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of a recent national study conducted at The University of Texas was to ascertain the current status of the practice of formally evaluating full-time faculty in public two-year colleges. A systematic wide-spread effort was made to determine the extent to which different evaluation concepts are being utilized. Further, since little is known about the effects these concepts have on the members of an institution that use them, this was also investigated.

A survey, based on evaluation elements identified in the literature, was mailed to a random sample of two-year colleges in the United States in November of 1982. These surveys were addressed to the Chief Academic Officer of each institution. Of the 210 colleges surveyed, 141 responses were returned from which data was collected.

The information provided by the survey included five areas from which data was tabulated: (1) climate of the organization when the evaluation system was established; (2) development of the purpose(s) and criteria used in the evaluation system; (3) procedures used to obtain information in the evaluation system; (4) apprasial review and feedback processes used in the evaluation system; and (5) impact of the evaluation process. From this data, not only the usage of elements within these areas, but also the relationship of these elements to overall satisfaction was explored.

Summary of Findings

The Practice of Faculty Evaluation:

The findings indicated that most of the elements outlined in a comprehensive theoretical model derived from current literature are those also practiced in some form nationally. More specifically, the practice of formal faculty evaluation in those organizations surveyed include the following elements:

(1) The input of the college constituency in its development and operation.

(2) An emphasis on classroom instruction and faculty development.

(3) The use of multiple sources and multiple methods of evaluation to gather information on performance in multiple areas of responsibility.

Elements that appear to be divergent in practice from those based on theory are the following:

(1) The lack of individualized evaluation procedures and standards of performance.

(2) The emphasis on systematic classroom observation to gather performance information.

(3) The lack of reward system-evaluation linkages.

(4) The lack of consistent policy, both in regard to the frequency in administering the evaluation to faculty members and in regard to the frequency of evaluating the evaluation process itself.

(5) The deemphasis on training personnel, both in regard to the performance of the evaluation itself and in reviewing the performance.

(6) The little-used practice of separating evaluation procedures if the purposes of evaluation are for both administrative decision-making and faculty improvement.

Even though the respondents were generally satisfied with their particular evaluation systems as practiced, almost half of the respondents indicated that the cost in terms of time and energy are either insufficient or excessive. Given this state of affairs and the fact that many of the discrepancies listed imply expenditures of time and energy to implement, it is assumed that the current practices with regard to the formal evaluation of faculty in public two-year colleges will basically remain unchanged in the foreseeable future.

A series of bivariate correlational analyses between the evaluation factors as outlined by theory and practice and the overall satisfaction level with evaluation provided some interesting findings. Some of the expected results that correlated significantly with satisfaction were:

(1) Participation of the college constituency in the formulation and implementation of the evaluation system.

(2) The emphasis on faculty improvement.

(3) The use of clearly-defined criteria and standards of performance.

(4) The training of evaluators.

(5) Consultation strategies that include alternative modes for improvement.

(6) Adequate commitment of time and money toward the operation of the system.

These all seem to have a common theme--that is, credibility with the system. When the members of a system participate in its development and operation, theory suggests that they will tend to own the system. Further, if the system is geared toward faculty improvement and the members believe that this is so based on the procedures used to achieve this goal, there will be more trust engendered in the system. Ownership and trust in the system should lead to increased satisfaction.

Some of the factors that did not have a significant effect in terms of satisfaction level were as follows:

(1) Use of an outside consultant in system development.

(2) Having separate policies and procedures if there is more than one purpose for evaluation.

(3) Individualized evaluation procedures.

(4) Use of multiple sources of evaluation.

(5) The adaption of evaluation instruments.

(6) An optimum frequency for both evaluating the faculty member and having the evaluation procedure itself reviewed.

(7) Evaluation of the performance of administrative personnel.

(8) Reward system-evaluation linkages.

(9) Length of time the evaluation system has been in operation.

(10) Having appeal procedures.

Most of these are procedural variables that take additional time and energy to implement. Since it is highly related to the satisfaction factor, the time/energy cost factor could have influenced the relationship of satisfaction with some of the above variables.

Four significant negative relationships were found with satisfaction:

(1) When respondents were greatly dissatisfied with a prior evaluation system.

(2) When a collective bargaining representative had input into the development of performance criteria.

(3) When the primary purpose of evaluation was based on external reasons (e.g. state mandate).

(4) When the results of student evaluations entered into the determination of pay raise and retention/salary decisions.

The first of these relationships has interesting implications, in that the greater the dissatisfaction of the members with a prior system of evaluation, the less satisfied these members will be with their current system of evaluation. This implies that those organizations wanting to

redesign an evaluation system that had been unsatisfactory, should take additional precautions and time to implement a new system. These organizations should particularly emphasize the credibility factors that were outlined earlier. The remaining relationships also appear to be related to credibility, in that systems, imposed by an external source will less likely be trusted. Additionally, the use of student evaluation of performance for such critical decisions as pay and retention will probably lack credibility as perceived by the faculty member.

Finally, based on the multiple regression technique used, the variables that could be best used to predict satisfaction were identified. The variables identified were:

(1) Consistency of procedures based on the purpose of evaluation (if for either improvement of instruction or for personnel decision-making).

(2) Commitment of time and money to the operation of the system.

(3) Participation of the college constituency in the establishment and implementation of the system.

(4) Existence of clearly-defined performance goals.

These findings once again point to the underlying factor of credibility with the system.

Conclusions

This study has some important implications in regard to policy development for academic administrators. Particularly in times of limited resources and accountability, it would be desirable for the academic administrator to know what types of evaluation procedures will lead to the greatest levels of satisfaction. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that an evaluation system be developed that is primarily based on improvement of instruction. Furthermore, evaluation procedures should be developed that are clearly consistent with this purpose. Secondly, the college administration should ensure that there are adequate funds to carry out the procedures planned and personnel who would have the time and skill to perform the operation adequately. An evaluation system used for personnel decision-making should also be effective, according to the findings, as long as the procedures are consistent with the purpose. The key factor appears to be credibility. If the evaluation system is credible, as perceived by the college constituency, it should be successful.

Those administrators wanting to "fine tune" their system could modify their established system by considering one or more of the evaluation procedures that appear to lead to satisfaction. Particular emphasis should be placed on those procedures relating to satisfaction but not currently widely practiced. These factors could include the development of predetermined standards of performance and the training of evaluators in the techniques of the evaluation process and the appraisal review.

Another procedure that appears to be neglected, which in the long run should pay off for the academic affairs officer, is conducting research to determine the effects that the evaluation is having on the actual improvement of faculty performance. This information could be used in addition to the opinions on overall satisfaction to determine if the evaluation system needs to be changed or fine tuned in any way.

In summary, the specific procedures used do not appear to be the critical factors in the satisfactory evaluation of faculty members. There are today a wide variety of evaluation procedures that differ in scope and practice, but still appear to be satisfactory. What does seem to be important is that the evaluation system developed be comprehensive and credible. If so, the evaluation process should lead to acceptance by the college constituency, and as a consequence, be instrumental in leading to more effective instructional performance. Only in this way can faculty evaluation become an integral part of a community college's efforts toward becoming more accountable to their clients.

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